



How Many U.S. Army 5-Star Generals Have There Been and Who Were They?



U.S. Army Center of Military History

The temporary grade of “General of the Army” (5-star) was provided for by **Public Law 482, 78th Congress**, approved Dec. 14, 1944, and became permanent on March 23, 1946, under provisions of **Public Law 333, 79th Congress**. Below are the 5-star generals and their dates of rank:

- **General of the Army George C. Marshall: Dec. 16, 1944.**
- **General of the Army Douglas MacArthur: Dec. 18, 1944.**
- **General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower: Dec. 20, 1944.**
- **General of the Army Henry H. Arnold: Dec. 21, 1944. Arnold was redesignated General of the Air Force pursuant to *Public Law 58, 81st Congress, May 7, 1949*.**
- **General of the Army Omar N. Bradley: Sept. 20, 1950.**



George C. Marshall

The grade of General of the Armies of the United States is associated with two officers in our history, GEN George Washington and GEN John J. Pershing, although only Pershing actually held it.

After Washington's death, an *Act of May 14, 1800*, specifically authorized President John Adams to suspend any further appointment

to the office of General of the Armies of the United States, “having reference to economy and the good of the service.” Although the office was not expressly referred to in any of the actions taken to reduce or disband forces that had been raised in contemplation of war with France, it ceased when it was not mentioned in the *Act of March 16, 1802*, which determined the peacetime military establishment.

Congress enacted legislation authorizing the grade of General of the Army July 25, 1866. On that date, the new grade was conferred on LTG Ulysses S. Grant. The grade was recognized and continued in various acts until the *Act of July*



Douglas MacArthur

15, 1870, which contained the requirement that “the offices of general and lieutenant general shall continue until a vacancy shall exist in the same, and no longer, and when such vacancy shall occur in either of said offices shall become inoperative, and shall, by virtue of this act, from thence forward be held to be repealed.”

LTG William T. Sherman, Grant's successor, was appointed as General of the Army on March 4, 1869, and after retiring in February 1884, was placed on the retired list as General of the Army. Under the provisions of the *Act of March 3, 1885*, authorizing the appointment of a “General of the Army on the retired list,” this grade was also conferred on Grant shortly before his death on July 23, 1885. The title ceased to exist as a grade of military rank upon Sherman's death on Feb. 14, 1891.

Sherman's successor was LTG Philip H. Sheridan, who could not be promoted to General of the Army because of the 1870 law.



Dwight D. Eisenhower

ferred on Sheridan and was discontinued when he died while still on active duty Aug. 5, 1888.



Henry H. Arnold

War Department General Orders No. 92, Oct. 26, 1872, changed the insignia to two silver stars with the arms of the United States in gold between them. Sherman and Sheridan both wore the new insignia.

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Congress, however, enacted legislation June 1, 1888, shortly before Sheridan's death, that discontinued the grade of lieutenant general and merged it with that of General of the Army. The grade of General of the Army was conferred on Sheridan and was discontinued when he

War Department General Orders No. 75, Sept. 5, 1866, prescribed that the insignia for the newly authorized General of the

Army grade would be four stars. Grant wore this insignia, as did Sherman, until

War Department General Or-

Congress revived the grade of General of the Armies of the United States by *Public Law 45, Sept. 3, 1919*, to honor Pershing for his wartime service. He retired with that rank on Sept. 13, 1924, and held it until his death on July 15, 1948.

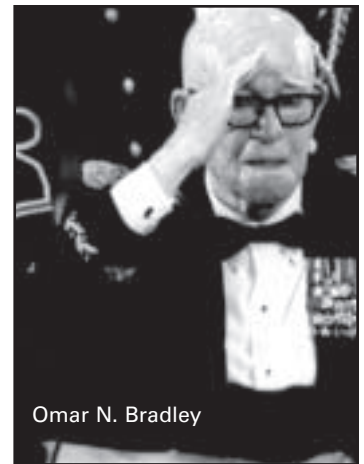
Sept. 13, 1924, and held it until his death on July 15, 1948. No other officer held this specific title until 1976, when President Gerald R. Ford posthumously appointed George Washington General of the Armies of the United States and specified that he would rank first among all officers of the Army, past and present.

When Pershing was appointed General of the Armies, he continued to wear the four stars that he, as well as

GENs Tasker H. Bliss and Peyton C. March, had adopted under the provisions of then current uniform regulations, which permitted them to prescribe the insignia denoting their grade. *Army Regulations 600-35, Personnel: The Prescribed Uniform, Oct. 12, 1921*, and all subsequent editions during Pershing's lifetime,

made no mention of insignia for General of the Army but prescribed that generals would wear four stars. Pershing at no time wore more than four stars.

Following the establishment of the General of the Army grade on Dec. 14, 1944, *Army Regulations 600-35* were changed to prescribe that Generals of the Army would wear five stars. Although Pershing continued to wear only four, he remained pre-eminent among all Army personnel, by virtue of Congressional action and Army regulations governing rank and precedence, until his death.



Omar N. Bradley

DID YOU KNOW?

